



as a

hobby

for

women

Printing as a hobby- for women

(Excerpts from a talk by William F. Haywood to the New Jersey Woman's Press Club, March, 1956)

ON a preliminary examination, there would appear to be little of the feminine touch attending the birth of the "art preservative." There is no mention of Frau Gutenberg helping Johann with his do-it-yourself project of creating movable types of cast métal. In the *Encyclopedia Britannica* section on printing, no woman rates a line. A little digging uncovers more information, however. Women were setting type as far back as 1477 in Florence, we learn. First woman to gain fame as a printer was Anna Rugerin, who apparently printed the first book by a woman, in Augsburg, Germany, in 1484.

In America, the first printing establishment was set up by a woman, Elizabeth

Glover. The idea was her husband's, for he wanted to set up a press in connection with the establishment of a college. Purchasing a press and supplies in England, he sailed for home with his family in 1638. Unfortunately, he fell ill and died during the voyage. His widow, however, proceeded to open the printing house in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the following year, employing as a manager one Stephen Daye, now famous in the annals of printing.

In 1695, Dinah Nuthead took over the business of her late husband in Maryland. She was the first woman in America to be in complete charge of a printing office.

From 1704 to 1788 there were 78 newspapers published in the Colonies. Sixteen were issued by women. The first newspaper in America, the *Boston News Letter*, was conducted throughout the Revolution by Mrs. Margaret Draper. When the British troops besieged Boston, her paper was the only one which was not suppressed. "Never underestimate the power of a woman"?

Everyone knows Ben Franklin worked as an apprentice for his brother James in Boston before he left for Philadelphia, but it is not so well known that his brother's widow, Anne Smith Franklin, successfully continued her husband's business for thirty years after his death. She and her daughters were considered correct and quick compositors at the case. Of his own wife's part in his work, Ben wrote: "She proved a good and faithful helpmate; assisted me much by attending the Shop."

By the beginning of the 18th Century, women were active in the printing field all over the world. In England, the first daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant*, was begun in 1702 by Elizabeth Mallett. And in 1794 a printing school for women was opened in Paris. Women had come into printing to stay.

My subject, however, concerns printing as a hobby, in particular. There is nothing new in the concept of printing as a pursuit for the amateur. But by amateur I mean, of

course, one whose interest is the love of the work and not profit. Almost from the beginning there were those who embraced the medium out of desire for self-expression and a love of the craft as an art form.

The private presses have played an important part in book production ever since the 15th century, when Johann Muller of Nurnberg printed astronomical works by himself and his friends. Men of wealth who took up printing as a hobby, such as Horace Walpole, and competent craftsmen like Baskerville and William Morris, who set up their own shops, contributed much to the advancement of printing as an art form. This is partly because such an establishment, printing only a limited number of copies for a discriminating clientele, can carry out experiments which a commercial plant would not dare attempt.

Women had a part in these activities, too. In 1894, French painter and engraver Lucien Pissarro, and his wife, Esther, started the Eragny Press. Together the artists

designed, engraved in wood, and printed books famous for their beautiful colored block prints.

Undoubtedly the most famous private press in this country was the Village Press of Bertha and Frederic W. Goudy and Will Ransom. Mrs. Goudy did most of the composition, while her husband was designing and cutting the type faces so well known today. There are, too, many amateurs not well known, who have participated to a lesser degree in the practice of printing. As far back as 1860, the first girl editor made her appearance in the person of Nellie Williams. Her brother owned a printing office, and when he left for the Civil War, she came into possession. She promptly started to publish the *Penfield Extra*.

Amateur papers were becoming very numerous, and in 1869 the first convention of hobby editors was held at the home of Charles Scribner, proprietor of *Scribner's Monthly*, now the *Century* magazine. And in 1873 several young publishers went to

Vienna and printed a paper on the grounds of the World's Fair. They tried to repeat this success at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, but were coldly turned away. In the same city that year, however, they organized the National Amateur Press Association, which continues to actively serve the interests of today's amateur journalists. Old-timers in the hobby who retain an active interest in the pastime have organized under the name of The Fossils, Inc., and meet annually to relive their initiation into the mysteries of publishing for pleasure.

Girl printers were looked at with raised eyebrows in the early days, as may be attested by the account of Libbie Adams of Elmira, New York. Using the pen name of Nettie Sparkle, she published the *Youthful Enterprise* on a small, hand-inked Star press. Her printed assertion that she did all the manual work on a ten-page, thirty-column monthly was questioned so often that she was forced to go with her father to the

county clerk and swear out an affidavit to that effect. Nettie was fifteen years old at the time.

Among the present-day hobby printers are several feminine craftsmen. One of the most artistic and enthusiastic is Mrs. Helen Wesson, who followed her husband and his press to Japan, where his work took him after the last war. The numbers of their paper, *Siamese Standpipe*, are evidence of the effervescent personalities of this couple and a reflection of their artistic talents. They have taken full advantage of the Oriental surroundings by using handmade Japanese papers and illustrations with a Far East motif. They are bringing up three junior printers.

There are several other girls, married to hobbyists, who found their husbands' avocation too interesting to resist. Willametta Keffer of Roanoke, Virginia, is one of these. A prolific writer, she found the printed journal an outlet not only for her writing, but a fascinating new craft for her

hands. Hazel Segal, now of Bristol, Pennsylvania, an English war bride of an American GI, took up her man's leisure-hours pastime shortly after he brought her back here with him.

To close on a more personal note, I can tell you that I met my wife in the basement print shop of a fellow hobbyist, Burton Crane of the *New York Times*. Both of us are members of the Amateur Printers Club, which meets at the homes of members to print a small paper during the day of the meeting. It could be said that a romance blossomed in the aromatic atmosphere of printer's ink, to the music of type clicking in the stick and the press clunking away.

« *Hand-set in Weiss types and printed on an 8x12 C&P Old Style press at the Private Press of the Haywoods in Fair Lawn, N.J., for the first book of the New York Chappel. 1960*



